

VZCZCXRO2432
PP RUEHDE RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHDS #2197/01 1941743
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 131743Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6985
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 002197

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/AA
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA AND USCENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2017

TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: (C-AL7-01035) ETHIOPIA: WFP OFFICIAL DISCUSSES
ONLF AND COUNTERINSURGENCY IN OGADEN

REF: A. STATE 88346 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 2196

[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 2027

[1](#)D. ADDIS ABABA 1308

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING DCM. REASON: 1.4 (B),(D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. An American security coordinator for the World Food Programme (WFP), who has traveled extensively in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region to coordinate WFP airdrops, assesses that the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) does not seek to target Americans or humanitarian organizations, despite a large-scale attack on Chinese oil workers in April (ref D). The WFP official reports that the Ethiopian military launched its latest counterinsurgency campaign against the ONLF in the Ogaden following the May 28 attempted assassination of the Somali Region's President; since then, all commercial food deliveries to the Somali Region have been halted by the military. Suspension of commercial deliveries exacerbates food insecurity in the Region, according to the WFP official, as emergency food relief for 500,000 beneficiaries has not been delivered since the beginning of 2007. The GOE has not explicitly banned WFP from delivering emergency food, but states it cannot guarantee the security of convoys; WFP typically uses commercial trucks and does not use military escort. The WFP official reported that Ethiopian troops are being flown to Gode on commercial flights, and have restricted all vehicular traffic from departing Gode. The WFP official identified traditional ONLF strongholds, and noted that "several hundred" ONLF forces with vehicle-mounted weapons briefly seized the town of Kelafo in May. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 28, A/DCM, REFCOORD, and ORA analysts met with Peter Van Orden (STRICTLY PROTECT), Addis Ababa-based Field Security Officer for the WFP, in order to discuss WFP operations in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region. Van Orden is an Amcitt former U.S. Marine who has worked for UN agencies for nearly 20 years, including 4 years for WFP in Ethiopia. He traveled extensively throughout the Somali Region (from Jijiga to Shilabo), including ONLF strongholds, in 2004 in order to open humanitarian corridors; Van Orden also met with ONLF representatives in the Ogaden in late 2006 to coordinate WFP airdrops of food relief.

[1](#)3. (C) Ethiopia's Somali Region had long been "totally neglected," with no paved roads beyond Jijiga (in the

northern part of the Region), and little economic development by the Addis Ababa-based federal government, prompting the local population to feel marginalized, Van Orden said. Lack of infrastructure, particularly roads, was possibly a deliberate measure, he said, as the Somali Region served as a buffer between Ethiopia and neighboring Somalia, from which he said 50,000 refugees had entered the Somali Region but had moved to Kenya. Since the December 2006 Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia, there had been more banditry in the Somali Region, as well as an upsurge in violence. The UN traditionally reported insecurity in Fik, Warder, and Kebridehar, he added.

14. (C) Van Orden assessed that the Ethiopian National Defense Force's (ENDF) current counterinsurgency campaign in the Ogaden was prompted by the May 28 attempted assassination of Somali Regional State President Abdullahi Hassan, who was wounded while giving a speech in Jijiga at a public celebration of the 16th anniversary of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) victory over the previous Derg regime. GOE officials have attributed the attack to the ONLF, although the ONLF has publicly denied responsibility (in contrast, the ONLF publicly claimed responsibility for the April 24 attack on a Chinese oil facility in the Ogaden).

FOOD AID ALLOCATED FOR 500,000 NOT DISTRIBUTED

15. (C) Van Orden expressed concern of possible famine conditions evolving in the Ogaden, due to the suspension of both emergency food aid and commercial food deliveries:

ADDIS ABAB 00002197 002 OF 004

-- He confirmed that WFP had identified 500,000 beneficiaries in the Somali Region (for emergency food relief), but that food aid allocated for them remained in WFP's primary stockpile at a warehouse in Dire Dawa, as it could not be distributed. WFP food was typically distributed to schools, food for work programs, and others, through the federal government's Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) and monitored by WFP.

-- Whereas WFP convoys previously delivered food to the Ogaden at least weekly, the last such "regular" delivery had occurred six weeks earlier (i.e., in May), due to the launch of the ENDF's counterinsurgency campaign. (NOTE: In a separate July 3 meeting, the WFP Country Director reported that food aid for targeted supplementary feeding had last been delivered to the Somali Region in May 2007, but that emergency food aid had been suspended since January 2007; see ref B. END NOTE.)

-- Neither the GOE nor the DPPA had explicitly forbidden WFP food deliveries, but authorities had declared that travel to the Ogaden was now at the UN's own risk, and that the security of UN personnel could not be guaranteed. WFP typically hired commercial trucks, not UN-marked vehicles, to deliver food, and did not travel with armed escorts; they had traveled under Ethiopian military escort only under the previous Communist Derg regime (prior to 1991). Van Orden asserted that the ENDF general in Harar had ordered commercial deliveries halted.

-- As mid-July to August was the rainy season in the Somali Region, failure to resume food delivery soon could create difficulties for distribution, Van Orden said, requiring that food be delivered by air. Even if humanitarian corridors were allowed, the current suspension of all commercial food delivery was a significant concern; Somali pastoralists traditionally needed to stock food as a buffer in preparation for the rainy season, Van Orden said. All commercially available food was reportedly going only to the ENDF.

-- Van Orden was not aware of any ongoing UNOCHA assessments in the Somali Region (as of June 28), nor of any in the previous six weeks. ICRC (based in Gode) was conducting an assessment, which he commented would likely be the most credible. The WFP Country Representative had raised concerns about food insecurity in the Ogaden the previous week with the DPPA. Van Orden suggested engaging Deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse, or pushing for political discussions with the ONLF outside Ethiopia. (NOTE: The UNDP Resident Representative subsequently raised concerns with Deputy PM Addisu; see ref B. END NOTE.)

ENDF REINFORCEMENTS FLYING TO GODE

¶6. (C) According to Van Orden, the ENDF maintained headquarters in Gode, Warder, Kebridehar, and Degehabur, and was using regularly scheduled commercial Ethiopian Airlines flights to Gode, in order to deploy additional troops to the Ogaden. (NOTE: Ethiopian Airlines, a state-owned monopoly, flies 50-seat "Fokker 50" turboprops to Gode. END NOTE.) Van Orden collaborated reports from other UN and humanitarian NGO contacts that Gode town had been "locked down" for the last six weeks, suspending all commercial vehicular traffic, which he assessed as likely having a more significant impact than the lack of humanitarian corridors.

¶7. (C) Van Orden said the Ethiopian military had arrested, beaten, and then released two UNDP local staff at Degehabur (i.e., between Jijiga and Gode Zones), suspecting them of assisting three Amcit New York Times reporters who had been detained (and subsequently released) by the ENDF in the Ogaden. (NOTE: In an earlier, separate meeting with emboffs, foreign expat UNDP representative in Jijiga reported local staff detained and beaten by Ethiopian authorities. END NOTE.)

ADDIS ABAB 00002197 003 OF 004

ONLF: COOPERATION WITH WFP TO ALLOW HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

¶8. (C) WFP had not/not encountered difficulties with the ONLF. On the contrary, Van Orden said that WFP had consulted closely with ONLF leaders in both East Imi and West Imi woredas (in Gode and Afder Zones, respectively), as well as in Kelafo (in Gode Zone) in order to coordinate WFP airdrops of food during November-December 2006, following floods in those areas. According to Van Orden, ONLF strongholds included East Imi, part of Gode, Fik, Korahe, and Degehabur. Insurgent activity was common along the axis between Warder and Shilabo (in eastern Somali Region). ONLF representatives in the Somali Region appeared to have a coherent hierarchy, although that could derive in part from the ethnic Ogadeni clan structure, Van Orden noted. The ONLF representatives used Thuraya satellite phones, had weapons and vehicles, and resupplied itself through Somaliland, he added.

¶9. (C) Questioned about the likelihood of ONLF cooperation with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Van Orden said such collaboration would likely be limited to areas near Oromiya Region, such as East Imi and West Imi woredas, or Fik Zone.

¶10. (C) Van Orden assessed that other elements from Somalia, but not/not the ONLF, likely posed the greatest threat to Americans. A vehicle belonging the NGO, GOAL, had been shot at and burnt in the area in December 2006. Van Orden noted that the non-Ogadeni Shekash clan, dominant in West Imi, clashed with the Ogadeni in East Imi. Reports of the presence of the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF) began to surface a year ago, following the supposed expulsion of al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) from Ethiopia to Somalia several years earlier. Popular sentiment expressed during his 2004 visit suggested lack of popular support in

the Ogaden for the AIAI; local residents wanted the conflict to "stay in Somalia," he said.

¶11. (C) Van Orden observed that an aircraft operated by Abyssinian Flight Services, a private charter company under contract to the UN, had crashed in the Somali Region, but not/not as a result of hostile fire.

----- --
"SEVERAL HUNDRED" ONLF FORCES SURROUNDED KELAFO
----- --

¶12. (C) Van Orden corroborated reports from other contacts that five weeks earlier the ONLF had surrounded the entire town of Kelafo (in Gode Zone), using a force of "several hundred" with "technicals" (vehicles with mounted weapons), in an attempt to kill the town administrator, suspected of corruption. An Italian Muslim residing in Kelafo was not touched. (NOTE: Italian Charge confirmed this in a separate meeting; see ref B. END NOTE.)

¶13. (C) Van Orden reported that Chinese workers had withdrawn from the oil exploration facility attacked on April 24 by the ONLF (ref D), which he noted was north of Degehabur. (NOTE: Chinese charge, in separate meeting on July 3, confirmed the Chinese company's withdrawal from the Ogaden, stating they had "completed their work." END NOTE.) Van Orden said Ethiopian casualties of the ONLF's attack had all been "highlanders" (i.e., ethnic Tigrayans or Amhara, whom the ONLF believe have exploited the Ogaden).

¶14. (SBU) According to Van Orden, WFP's presence in the Somali Region consisted of offices in Jijiga (23 local staff and 1 international) and Gode (27 local staff and 1 international). Other humanitarian agencies at Jijiga included: FAO, WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, and UNDP. Those at Gode included: UNHCR (4 international staff), UNICEF, WFP, and ICRC. Adjacent to the Somali Zone, WFP had 24 local staff and 1 international at its warehouse in Dire Dawa.

¶15. (C) COMMENT. Van Orden's observations about the suspension of food deliveries, both commercial and emergency relief, and the subsequent possibility of future famine, were echoed by senior UN officials, including the UNDP Resident Representative and the WFP Country Director for Ethiopia, on

ADDIS ABAB 00002197 004 OF 004

July 3 (ref B). Van Orden did not have additional information either to corroborate or refute allegations of serious human rights abuses by Ethiopian security forces. Van Orden's personal contacts with ONLF leaders in the Ogaden in both 2004 and late 2006 lend credibility to his assessment that the ONLF does not seek to target Americans or humanitarian agencies. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO